

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Sri S. Jee, I.F.S., Chief

VETERINARY ASST. SURGEON,  
NANDANKANAN BIOLOGICAL PARK,  
P.O. BARANG, DIST. CUTTACK.

WILD LIFE CONSERVATION OFFICER,  
95-SAHEED NAGAR,  
BHUBANESWAR-751007,  
July 19, 1977.

Conservator of Forests, Orissa and to Sri G.  
M. Das, I.F.S., Chief Wild Life Warden,  
Orissa for providing facilities for observations.

L. N. ACHARJYO

S. MOHAPATRA

REFERENCES

- ACHARJYO, L. N. AND MISRA, R. (1973): Cheetal-  
Journal of Wild Life Preservation Society of  
India, 15 (4):49-55.
- ACHARJYO, L. N. AND TRIPATHY, A. P. (1974): A  
note on body colour and breeding habits in capti-  
vity of Common Palm Civet (*Paradoxurus herma-*  
*phroditus*) of Orissa. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.*  
17(3):601-603.
- PRATER, S. H. (1971): The Book of Indian Ani-  
mals. Bombay Natural History Society, Bombay,  
p. 88.

3. OBSERVATIONS ON THE ECOLOGY AND STATUS OF THE  
HISPID HARE IN RAJAGARH FOREST, DARRANG DISTRICT,  
ASSAM, IN 1975 AND 1976

(With a text-figure)

The Hispid Hare, also called the Assam Rabbit, *Caprolagus hispidus* (Pearson) (Lagomorpha : Leporidae), is more or less of the same body-size as that of the Common Hare. It is, however, distinguished by its coarser, bristly fur, dorsally dark brown in colour due to a mixture of black and brown hairs, ventrally brown up to chest and whitish on the abdomen, ear shorter than the skull and brown outside throughout, tail brown above and below and equal to or slightly shorter than the ear; hindleg short, but slightly longer than the forelegs.

The population of this interesting hare appears to have declined drastically in recent

years. At present it is said to be found along the foot of the Himalayas in a few isolated places from Uttar Pradesh to Assam. Till 1951 it has been recorded only from Kheri in Uttar Pradesh, and a few spots in Goalpara and Darrang Districts in Assam. However, on the basis of the latest report of its capture in Rajagarh Forest Reserve under Baranadi Forest Range, Mangaldai Sub-division, Darrang District, by J. C. Mallinson in 1971 (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 68 : 443-444), I visited the area in June 1975 and January 1976, to study the ecology and status of the Hispid Hare there. The survey was also conducted around Dharamjuli Tea Estate, Dimakushi,

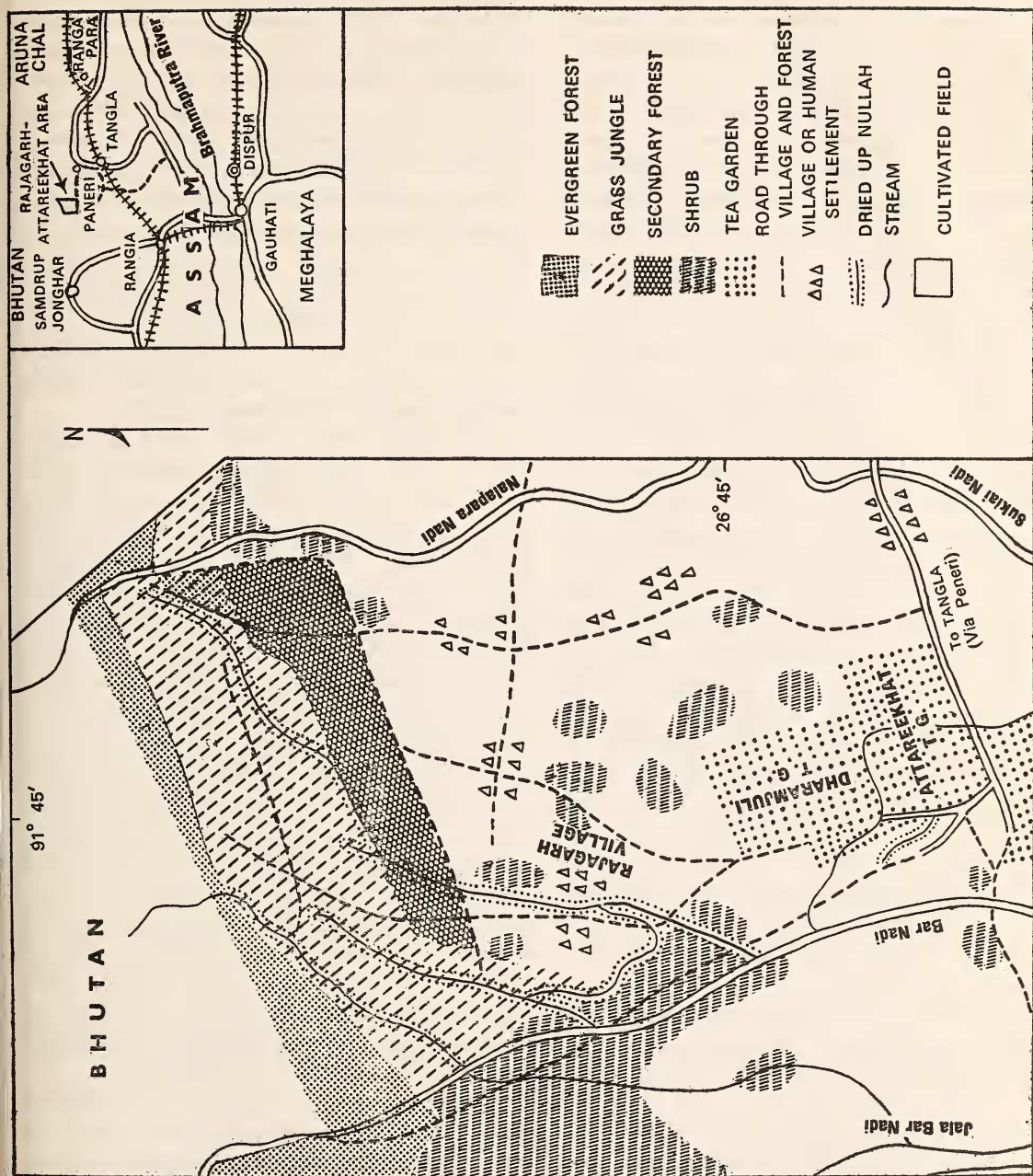


Fig. 1. Sketch map showing general topography of Rajagarh-Attarekhat area.

Nonai Forest Range, Majuli, Panery and from Bhutiachang to Kherkheria, all in Darrang District and about 3 to 45 km north and north-east of Attareekhath. From this survey and study it was evident that the Hispid is now found in the Rajagarh Forest Block, obviously due to its favourable ecological conditions.

Rajagarh lies about 5 km north of Attareekhath Tea Estate. This forest block includes the characteristic jungle and thatchlands of the Himalayan foothills, covering about 6-8 km east-west and 3-5 km north-south. The southern limit of the forest zone is bounded by secondary forest, consisting mostly of planted teak (Text-fig. 1). The thatch, typical grassland of the duars, grows up to about 3 to 3.5 metres height during the monsoon months and withers down to 1.5 to 2 metres during January to March. During our two visits, although the grass only stood about 1.5 metres tall, the animals could not be seen for the poor visibility in that habitat, but positive evidence of the presence of the Hispid Hare were obtained. However due to increased human settlement in the area, patches of forest and thatch are being cleared, thus upsetting the ecological requirements of the Hispid Hare.

The area is more or less flat but broken with very deep dried up 'nullahs' which are tributaries of the Bar Nadi or Nalapara Nadi. To the south of Rajagarh are a 2 to 3 km stretch of cultivated fields. Further south of this area are the tea gardens the Attareekhath and Dhamajuli Tea Estates.

The Hispid is a resident of the thatch and invades the southern cultivated fields occasionally for its favourite food. During January to April when the grass and the forest are set on fire, the Hispid moves to the cultivated fields, and shelters in tunnels and burrows on the embankments of 'nullahs'. Later, when the grass grows taller, it retreats to the

thatchland where it is very difficult to locate. When the thatch becomes too waterlogged during the height of the monsoon, the Hare moves into the forested areas of the foothills. However, just before the monsoon when the thatch is burnt or when during the winter months the local settlers who collect the 'Borangamni Kher' (Assamese name for these grasses), one may sometimes come across the Hare. Also, the 'garo' tribals who customarily trap animals encounter this animal on many occasions and invariably use it for the pot. They rarely sell the hare in the market. Their hunting activities are secretly done without the knowledge of the forest officials.

The Hispid Hare, locally called as *Hahapohu*, is not a very common animal at Rajagarh. On the contrary, the Rufous-tailed Hare, *Lepus nigricollis ruficaudatus* Geoffroy, is fairly common. This species, however, restricts itself in and around the cultivated fields and tea garden areas, and avoids the thatch. The Hispid, as reported by the locals, are slow-moving animals and do not dig burrows themselves. From the information gathered from the local 'shikaris', it appears that not more than 10 or 12 individuals of Hispid Hare have been caught during the last three or four years and their description of the animals—smaller ears, coarser coat, light brown as muga silk mixed with black, etc. tally well with that of the Hispid Hare. It is said that between January and March, young are usually caught. A pair of Hispids were said to have been raised from young from January 1975 by a 'shikari' at Rajagarh, but sold to a Cachari in Dimakushi Bazar in the last week of May 1975.

Besides occasional trapping and hunting by the local 'shikaries', it appears that carnivores like the Leopard-cat, *Felis bengalensis* Kerr, Large Indian Civet, *Viverra zibetha* Linnaeus, and the Small Indian Civet, *Viverricula indica*



(Desmarest), in the thatchland of Rajagarh have assisted in reducing the Hispid Hare population in the area. The village dogs are also said to prey upon this slow-moving animal at times.

The thatchland of Rajagarh offers protection to at least two threatened species, the Hispid Hare and the Pigmy Hog.

The following measures should be taken for

their conservation:

(1) The habitat should be preserved by preventing further infiltration of human settlements, (2) all hunting should be prohibited, (3) the thatchland should be protected from forest fire, and the seasonal collection of 'Borangamni Kher', banned (6) efforts should be made to educate the local people on the value of the two species.

ZOOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA,  
8, LINDSAY STREET,  
CALCUTTA 700016,  
July 13, 1977.

R. K. GHOSE

#### 4. BLACKBUCK (*ANTILOPE CERVICAPRA* LINN.) AT POINT CALIMERE

##### INTRODUCTION

One of the largest remaining populations of *Antelope cervicapra* Linn. is at the Point Calimere Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu. Daniel (1967) estimated the population of blackbuck at 750. Nair (1976) made a survey in 1974 and estimated the population at 340. These authors may also be referred to for habitat description etc. At the beginning of 1977 there were newspaper reports that the blackbuck were dying in large numbers. The officials of the forest department undertook a census in early 1977 and estimated the number of blackbuck at around 1500, and with this reassuring figure, the forest department allayed the fears of conservationists.

A census of the blackbuck was however undertaken by members of the Wildlife Conservation Society, Tiruchirapalli from 26th to 29th May 1977.

##### BLACKBUCK CENSUS

Most of the blackbuck live in the coastal strip of the sanctuary, and only a few were

noted inside the reserve forest. The census party of 15 members was divided into 5 groups, each equipped with a pair of binoculars. The total direct visual count method was adopted. Three groups were deployed in the southern part of the sanctuary and the remaining two groups in the eastern part of the sanctuary. Every group started from the base line namely, the sea and proceed landward counting the animals present on their rightside only. In enumerating the animals the following classification was followed: Adult males, Subadult males, Females and Fawns. A total of 506 animals were counted, (Table 1) distributed in 38 herds. The herd size varied from 1 (made up of a lone male) to a maximum of 49. There were three bachelor clubs consisting entirely of males numbering 3 to 7. 16.4% of the population was male; and 11.3% was adult male. 401 or 79.2% of the total population were females. The sex ratio is 1 male for 5 females.

##### BIOTIC DISTURBANCES

About 600 domestic cattle (cows and buffaloes) were found grazing side by side with